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ESSENTIAL UNITY OF ALL RELIGIONS

N. A. PALKHIVALA

FOREWORD
SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

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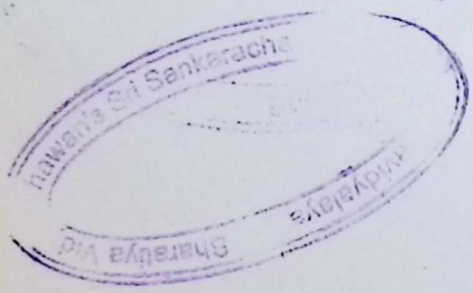

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आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, I-89,-i

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

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DIRECTOR
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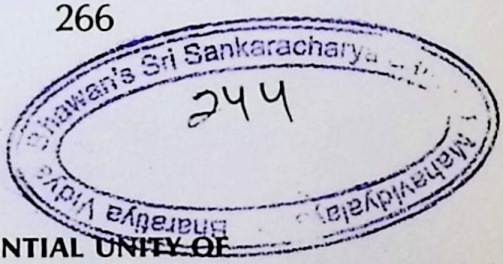

ESSENTIAL UNITY OF ALL RELIGIONS

By

N. A. PALKHIVALA

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1994

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

KULAPATI MUNSHI MARG
BOMBAY 400 007.

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PREFACE

The Sarva Dharma Maitri Pratishthan, a constituent institution of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, was inaugurated in Bombay on the eve of Gandhi Jayanti this year at a public function on October 1, 1990.

This is one of the many projects formulated by the National Committee constituted, in 1988, by the Government of India with our Uparashtrapati Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, as Chairman, to celebrate the Birth Centenary of Kulapati K. M. Munshi and the Golden Jubilee of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. (List of Members of the Committee is given in Appendix.)

This book is based on the Keynote Address delivered at the inaugural function by Sri N. A. Palkhivala, eminent Jurist and Vice-President of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

We are beholden to Swami Ranganathanandaji for blessing us with a Foreword.

S. RAMAKRISHNAN
GENERAL EDITOR

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FOREWORD

Some writers and some books sometimes voice not only their own thoughts, feelings and aspirations but also of many thousands of others in society too. This is what Sri Nani Palkhivala has done in this book *Essential Unity of All Religions* based on his Keynote Address at the inauguration of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's *Sarva Dharma Maitri Pratishthan* in Bombay on the eve of Gandhi Jayanti this year.

Sri Palkhivala's earlier book on *India's Priceless Heritage,* published by the Bhavan, is running its seventh edition. He is captivated by the spirit of universality and harmony of our traditional national culture and has tried, tried successfully, to share it with his fellow-citizens in India and with his fellow-humans abroad.

The subject matter of this book had been earlier dealt with in a masterly way in a large book by the late Bharat Ratna Dr. Bhagavan Das of Varanasi, published by the Bhavan decades ago.

Sri Palkhivala says in this book: "Nothing could be more explicit than the message of universal brotherhood and mutual respect preached in every great religion." Referring to Indian cultural values,

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he adds: "The quintessence of ancient Indian culture, and of great religions flourishing today, can be reduced to the five immortal ideals which our *Rishis* have been preaching indefatigably for ages: *Satya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema* and *Ahimsa.*"

These great values were broadcast by the great Mauryan Emperor Ashoka of the third century before Christ all over his vast empire, which included all that vast landmass stretching from Tashkent area in the U.S.S.R., through Afghanistan and Pakistan, down to the Karnataka region in the South of India, through various edicts on rocks and pillars which our people can read even today. And one such edict, which is relevant in the context of the present book, contains the following condensation of India's age-old wisdom with respect to religion and culture: *Samavāya eva Sādhuḥ*— 'Concord alone is correct and proper.'

That India followed the path of concord all through its long history is testified to by many historical incidents and by several discerning foreign visitors. One of them is Abdul Razak, an Envoy from the Court of Persia to Indian States about the middle of the fifteenth century.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan quotes in his book *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (p. 312) the following impressions of Abdul Razak about what he saw in the State of Calicut (in Kerala) as given in the

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book: *Murray's Discoveries and Travels in Asia:* (Vol. 2, p. 20).

> "The people (of Calicut) are infidels; consequently, I consider myself in an enemy's country, as the Mohammadans consider everyone who has not received the Koran. Yet, I admit that I meet with perfect toleration, and even favour; we have two mosques and are allowed to pray in public."

I am sure that this book by Sri Palkhivala will help our people to re-capture that ancient Indian wisdom of *Samavāya* or Concord.

RANGANATHANANDA

Sri Ramakrishna Math
Hyderabad 500 029.

22nd October, 1990.

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1

CRISIS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Inter-faith harmony and consciousness of the essential unity of all religions is the very heart of national integration and identity.

It is equally clear that national integration is born in the hearts of the citizens. When it dies there, no army, no government can save it. States of mind precede States. Divisiveness in the consciousness of citizens on caste or religious lines is an unfailing solvent of national integration.

The most crying need for India today is to undergo catharsis, a course of emotional cleansing. Ayodhya is shorthand for a civil dispute with rich potential for a civil war. When the moral bedrock of Indian society has turned to lava and Mandal and Ayodhya are looming ahead, we need to replenish our minds with some vital truths—pearls of great

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price which we have mindlessly dropped along the way.

There are twelve great living religions in the world. (Incidentally, the word "living" is tautologous, since no great religion has ever perished). All the twelve flourish in India.

The history of the last five millennia bears witness to the fact that the soul of India aspires to integration and assimilation. Down the ages, Indian culture has been made richer and deeper as a result of absorbing what is best in outside influences and integrating those various influences to grace and enrich its own identity. One recalls the fine summing up of Dr. K. M. Munshi:

> *"Indian Culture is a living force. It absorbs alien elements when necessary but transmutes them into a new pattern of homogeneous richness. It is, therefore, a tremendous force of power and beauty which made us what we are in the world today; and will make us what we want to be in the world of tomorrow. Its vitality has been shaping attitudes, disciplines and approaches to life to suit new conditions, age after age—as vigorously in the past as in the present."**

**Pilgrimage to Freedom*, Bhavan's publication

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Divisiveness is the oldest and the most persistent disease which has afflicted the human race through aeons of existence. There are 195 conflicts raging in the world today (not counting Iraq's invasion of Kuwait) and all of them are internecine, i.e. between factions within the same country. The supreme irony of history is that India with the great gift of integration and assimilation has also become a sad example of growing divisiveness. As a disease on the moral plane, divisiveness is no less devastating than AIDS on the physical plane. Far too many of our countrymen have enough religion to hate one another, but not enough to love one another.

A man may study or practise religion. But if he is a fanatical fundamentalist, he deserves to rank as a religious illiterate, whatever his formal education may be. The words of T. S. Eliot come to one's mind—"We had the experience, but missed the meaning." A religious bigot may have made a study of theology but, by definition, he has not understood the true meaning of religion. *Fundamentalism is the equivalent of trivialization of religion. "Fanatics have their dreams," said Keats, "wherewith they weave a paradise for a sect."*

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2

THE MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETS

Nothing could be more explicit than the message of universal brotherhood and mutual respect preached in every great religion.

The Lord says in the Gita, "Whatever may be the form in which each devotee seeks to worship Me with faith, I make their faith steadfast in that form alone."

The Vedas proclaim, "That which exists is only One; the sages speak of it variously."

The Bible preaches, "No man liveth unto himself. We are all parts of one another. God hath made of one blood all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth."

The Koran affirms, "All creatures are members of the one family of God."

Guru Nanak said, "Neither Hindu nor Muslim am I/We are God's children all."

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Guru Nanak followed the principle of giving no appointment to anybody who came to see him unless the visitor had first partaken of food in the community kitchen (*langar*) where Muslims and Hindus, Brahmins and Shudras, all sat together: a fine way of inculcating humility, equality and fraternity and driving home the lesson that we are all children of the Eternal Master.

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3

ESSENTIAL UNITY OF ALL RELIGIONS

The harmony of all religions has been beautifully and comprehensively dealt with by Dr. Bhagavan Das in his *magnum opus*—"Essential Unity of All Religions".* The Bharat Ratna has never been conferred on a more deserving Indian than Dr. Bhagavan Das. An abridged edition of his great work ought to be made compulsory reading in every school and college.

A thinker has observed that Christianity has been tried and has failed: the religion of Christ remains to be tried. The same can be said about every other religion—such is the universal propensity to encrust and encumber truth with dogma, religion with ritual, essence with trappings. An enlightened spirit would go straight

---

*Bhavan's publication. An abridged edition is to be brought out by the Bhavan soon.

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to the truth behind the dogma, the religion behind the ritual, the essence behind the trappings.

It is amazing that the experience and insight of all mystics, *rishis* and *sufis* is identical. "All mystics", it has been truly observed, "speak the same language because they belong to the same country." That country is the Kingdom of Heaven which, as Christ taught us, is within us and not without. All seers perceive the ultimate reality with the eyes of their soul.

No one knows whether the great poet-saint Kabir was a Hindu or a Muslim. The story goes that when Kabir died, both the Hindus and the Muslims claimed his body: the Hindus wanted to cremate it according to Hindu rites, and the Muslims were desirous of burying the *pir* in the Muslim way. But when they came to take charge of the earthly remains of the saint, both groups discovered that there was only a heap of flowers under the shroud! If the story is not true, it deserves to be true. In the words of Dr. S. R. Sharma, "How like Kabir again—dead or alive—a divine weaver of the hearts of men, who alchemised old hatreds into the gold of love. . . ."*

---

*'Soul of Indian History', a Bhavan's publication

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4

QUINTESSENCE OF INDIAN CULTURE

Civilization is an act of the spirit. Ancient India was far more civilized than modern India with its satellites in space.

The quintessence of ancient Indian culture, and of great religions flourishing today, can be reduced to the five immortal ideals which our *rishis* have been preaching indefatigably for ages—*Satya, Dharma, Shanti, Prem* and *Ahimsa*. None of these five hallowed words has an exact equivalent in the English language. The various nuances of each of these five words cannot be precisely encapsulated in a single word in any modern language.

Satya means not only the truth, as in the maxim "There is no religion higher than truth". *Satya* also implies intellectual integrity, being true to yourself, acting according to one's conscience.

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Dharma connotes righteousness, nobility, proper conduct—a philosophy of life which makes you a worthy citizen of the world. A man who practises *Dharma* will have no hesitation in acknowledging "Obedience to the unenforceable". There are norms of nobility and righteousness which are wholly unenforceable by law but which *Dharma* alone enjoins you to observe. As Sri C. Rajagopalachari pointed out, India for centuries survived without a central government or any strong authority engaged in enforcing laws. What kept the nation together was the cohesive ideal of *Dharma*.

The word *Shanti* does not spell merely peace. It transcends peace. It is the calm of the mind, the serenity, inner peace and total stability within yourself which alone enables you to possess your soul before you die.

Prem is not merely love; it encompasses within it also the elements of compassion and understanding. *Prem* is the greatest force in the world—there never has been and never will be a substitute for it. It is *Prem* which can hold all human beings together. If the ancient Indian ideal of the entire human race being a single family—*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*—ever becomes a reality, it will be only when *Prem* is universally accepted as the inviolable principle of human behaviour.

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Finally, *Ahimsa*. There is far more to *Ahimsa* than merely non-violence and harmlessness. When you practise *Ahimsa* you identify yourself with all animate creatures. It involves a feeling of kinship, of oneness, with all life—your fellowmen and animals, birds and trees. In 1979, the world celebrated the centenary of Dr. Albert Einstein's birth and tributes were paid to him in all continents. Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the world-renowned physicist of the USA, said, "If I had to think of a single word for his attitude towards human problems, I would pick the Sanskrit word *Ahimsa*."

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5

TEACHINGS OF INDIAN LEADERS

Shivaji in his famous epistle to Emperor Aurangzeb wrote:

> "Islam and Hinduism appear as contrasted terms; but they are diverse pigments used by the Divine Painter to fill in His picture of the whole human race. If it be a mosque, the call is chanted in remembrance of Him; if it be a temple, the bell is rung remembering Him alone. To show bigotry towards any man's creed and practices is tantamount to altering the words of the Holy Book. To draw new lines on a picture is to find fault with the Painter."

Muslim leaders have been no less emphatic in their teaching that Hindus and Muslims must live in peace and harmony. Sayyid Ahmed Khan

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(1817-1898) uttered the following memorable words:

> "Centuries have passed since God desired that Hindus and Musalmans may share the climate and the produce of this land and live and die on it together. So it appears to be the will of God that these two communities may live together in this country as friends, or even like two brothers . . I have frequently said that India is a beautiful bride and Hindus and Muslims are her two eyes . . . . . If one of them is lost, this beautiful bride will become ugly."

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958) told our countrymen in 1921 that Hindu-Muslim partnership was sanctioned by the Prophet's own example:

> "When the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina he prepared a covenant between the Muslims and the Jews of Medina. In the covenant it was mentioned that ultimately the Muslims and non-Muslims would become one nation (*ummah vahidah*).
>
> "*Ummah* means a *qaum* or nation; *vahidah* means one.
>
> "Thus if I say that the Muslims of India cannot perform their duty unless they are united with the Hindus, it is in accordance with the tradition of the Prophet who

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himself wanted to make a nation of Muslims and non-Muslims."

Trusted by the divergent groups within the Congress, Maulana Azad was asked to preside when the Congress met in September 1923 to decide its future course. No one younger had been, or would be, given the honour. Maulana Azad was clear as to what was vital to the struggle for Swaraj, and what was indeed greater than the struggle itself. His stirring words which came from the heart were:

"If an angel descends from the heavens today and proclaims from the Qutb Minar that India can attain Swaraj within 24 hours provided I relinquish my demand for Hindu-Muslim unity, I shall retort: 'No my friend, I will give up Swaraj, but not Hindu-Muslim unity, for if Swaraj is delayed, it will be a loss for India, but if Hindu-Muslim unity is lost, it will be a loss for the whole of mankind.' "

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6

GANDHIJI—THE GREATEST INTEGRATOR

Undoubtedly, the greatest integrator of the century was Mahatma Gandhi. Throughout his life he worked ceaselessly to activize character, channelize service, and institutionalize brotherhood. Here are some of his most famous teachings, culled from his voluminous writings at different times:

"By religion, I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker.

"Indeed religion should pervade every one of our actions. Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality.

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"My Hinduism is not sectarian. It includes all the best that I know to be the best in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism.

"Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal?

"The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach not the dead level, but unity in diversity. The soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time.

"Gather together under one banner all men from all religions and races of India and infuse into them the spirit of solidarity and oneness to the utter exclusion of all communal and parochial sentiments."

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7

SRI AUROBINDO'S PREDICTION

After his school and college education abroad, Sri Aurobindo returned to India in 1893. (In the history of India, 1893 was a significant year. In that very year Swami Vivekananda addressed the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, Dadabhai Naoroji addressed the British Parliament as its first Indian member, and Gandhiji entered South Africa.)

When Sri Aurobindo came back to India, he was an atheist. He lived to become a profound seer and one of the greatest propounders of Indian culture and of the basic unity of all religions.

On the midnight of August 14, 1947—the eve of India's independence—the politicians were so full of themselves that they forgot to ask Sri Aurobindo to speak on the historic occasion. But a perceptive official at Trichinopoly

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radio station had the wisdom to ask the mystic-saint for words of guidance. Sri Aurobindo, refusing to accept the partition of India as permanent, gave this timeless message:

> "But the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled forever or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position among the nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated. This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way, unity may finally come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved; for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future."

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8

SURVIVAL OF MAN

No greater tribute has been paid to Indian culture than by Dr. Arnold Toynbee who, after surveying the story of modern materialistic civilization, observed:

"It is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race . . . At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is the Indian way—Emperor Asoka's and Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions. Here we have an attitude and spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family—and, in the Atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves."

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Man is an unfinished creature. Past history bears witness to the fact that Man is only a caricature of man to be. If a human being who lived 5000 years ago were to reappear in our midst, we would hardly recognize him as a member of our own species. Evolution is continuously progressing, and today's man will appear equally strange to the evolved human race 5000 years later.

Sarva Dharma Maitri—Inter-faith harmony—is necessary to achieve the realization—which is the foundation of all religions—that we are all children of the one Creator. It will accelerate the process of evolution and hasten what Sri Aurobindo called "the human cycle".

There is no doubt that a race weary of its own bloodshed and divisiveness will ultimately grope its way to a system which offers the only chance for its happy survival.

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APPENDIX

The National Committee appointed by the Government of India for Kulapati Munshi Centenary and Bhavan's Golden Jubilee Celebrations:

1.	Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma Vice-President of India ..	Chairman
2.	Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao ..	Vice-Chairman
3.	Shri N. D. Tiwari ..	Member
4.	Shri K. C. Pant ..	,,
5.	Smt. Sheila Dikshit ..	,,
6.	Shri R. K. Trivedi ..	,,
7.	Shri Mohammed Usman Arif ..	,,
8.	Shri S. B. Chavan ..	,,
9.	Shri Ramakrishna Hegde ..	,,
10.	Shri N. T. Rama Rao ..	,,
11.	Shri Girdharilal Mehta ..	,,
12.	Shri C. Subramaniam ..	,,
13.	Shri Pravinchandra V. Gandhi	,,
14.	Shri K. K. Birla ..	,,
15.	Shri N. A. Palkhivala ..	,,
16.	Prof. V. V. John ..	,,
17.	Dr. Rafiq Zakaria ..	,,
18.	Sardar Swaran Singh ..	,,
19.	Shri Sadiq Ali ..	,,
20.	Shri A. B. Vajpayee ..	,,
21.	Prof. Umashankar Joshi ..	,,
22.	Dr. V. K. Narayana Menon ..	,,
23.	Smt. Mrinalini Sarabhai ..	,,
24.	Shri R. C. Tripathi ..	Member-Secretary
25.	Shri S. Ramakrishnan ..	Member-Organising Secretary

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THE AUTHOR

Born on January 16, 1920, Shri N. A. Palkhivala ('Nani' to his vast circle of friends) took his M.A. degree and LL.B. degree with First Class Honours from the Bombay University.

He was a Professor of Law at the Government Law College, Bombay, and was appointed the Tagore Professor of Law at the Calcutta University.

He was a Member of the First and Second Law Commissions. He was elected in 1975 an Honorary Member of the Academy of Political Science, New York, in recognition of his "outstanding public service and distinguished contributions to the advancement of political science."

From 1977 to 1979 he was Ambassador of India to U.S.A. He was awarded Honorary LL.D.s by the Princeton University, New Jersey, and the Lawrence University, Wisconsin.

Besides **The Law and Practice of Income-Tax,** Shri Palkhivala is also the co-author of **Taxation in India** published by the Harvard University. Among his other books are : **The Highest Taxed Nation** and **Our Constitution Defaced and Defiled.**

He has argued a number of historical cases in the Courts of India and abroad. He appeared for India before the U.N. Special Tribunal in Geneva against Pakistan in the case involving territories in Kutch. He also appeared for India before the International Civil Aviation Organisation at Montreal and the World Court at The Hague in the case filed by Pakistan against India.

He is associated with several industrial and business houses as Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Director.

Shri N. A. Palkhivala is a Trustee and Vice-President of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. The Bhavan has published his book **India's Priceless Heritage** which has gone through eight editions.